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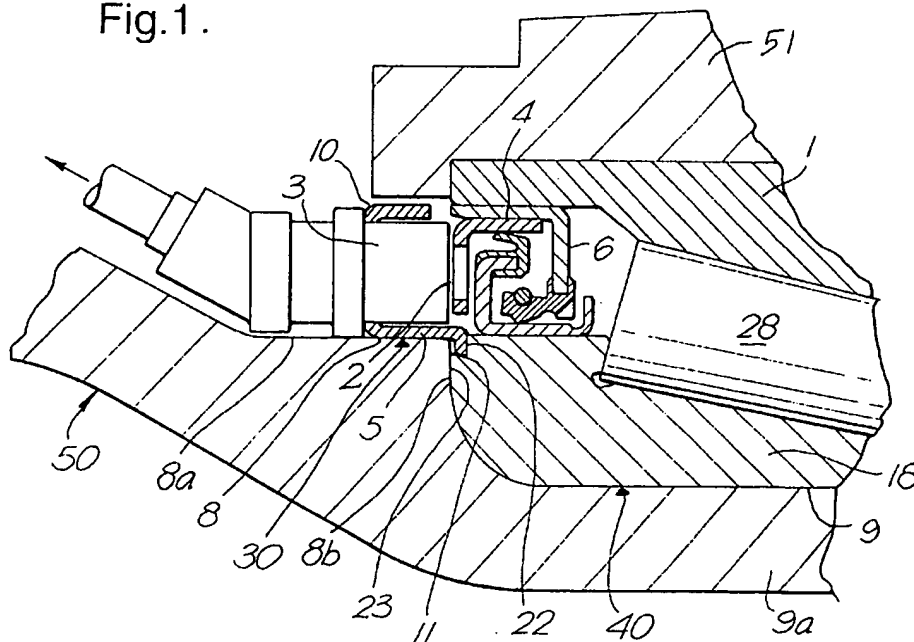
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(54) Combined bearing and tachometer sensor assembly

(57) A combined bearing and sensor assembly comprising a sensor unit 30 and a bearing unit 40. The sensor unit 30 includes a coupling ring 10 which has a radially inwardly directed lip 22 which engages with a groove 11 formed in the inner raceway 18 of the bearing unit 40. The coupling ring 10 also has an axially extending portion 5 the radially inwardly facing surface of which

engages with a sensor unit mounting surface 8a such that the sensor unit's engagement to the mounting surface 8a is greater than its engagement to the bearing unit 40). In this way the combined bearing and sensor unit may be sold, transported and fitted as a single unit but will separate to allow the sensor unit 30 to remain properly mounted when the bearing unit 40 is dismounted for general maintenance purposes.

Fig.1.



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Description

The present invention relates to a combined bearing and sensor assembly, and in particular to an assembly suitable for use in anti-lock braking systems.

Anti-lock braking systems generally require the use of sensors located close to individual bearings to monitor the speed of rotation of the bearings, for example, by measuring the speed at which the outer raceway rotates relative to a shaft on which both the sensor and the inner-raceway of the bearing are mounted. A typical sensor and bearing assembly of this type has a tone ring which is connected to, and rotates with, the outer raceway. The tone ring has a number of separate regions (for example magnetised regions) evenly spaced about the tone ring which are detectable as they pass close by the sensor. The frequency with which these regions are detected by the sensor can then be used to determine the speed of rotation of the outer raceway of the bearing. In practice, the rotation of the tone ring close to the sensor causes the sensor to generate an electrical signal whose frequency is proportional to the angular velocity of the tone ring and hence the outer raceway.

It is generally preferred to use as small a sensor as possible so as to minimise the total size of the combined bearing and sensor assembly. However, it has been discovered that if a small sensor is used, the air gap between the sensor and the tone ring must be very small and must be maintained at a specific thickness with only a very small acceptable margin before the separation becomes too large or too small; that is to say the gap between the sensor and the tone ring must be maintained to a very close tolerance. It has also been discovered, somewhat surprisingly, that even if the sensor is held in place with a coupling ring which engages, for example, a shaft onto which the bearing and sensor are to be mounted with a tight interference fit, the coupling ring, and thus the sensor, may still move axially along the shaft during normal usage of the bearing such that the air gap alters. Where a relatively small sensor is used such movement, and the consequent alteration of the air gap, may be sufficient to adversely affect the operation of the sensor.

Conventionally, sensor units for use in, for example, anti-lock braking systems have been sold and mounted separately from the bearing assembly. The fact that the sensor unit is separate from the bearing assembly is advantageous because this allows the bearing assembly to be dismantled periodically for maintenance of the bearing assembly. It also has a number of associated disadvantages. Firstly, it requires two mounting steps rather than just the one step involved in mounting a conventional (non-anti-lock braking system) bearing assembly, and the mounting of the two separate units is not straightforward since the gap between the sensor and the tone ring must be very accurately achieved and maintained; secondly, it is inconvenient for vehicle manufacturers who must ensure that the correct sensors are

used with the correct bearing units. Manufacturers would generally prefer to buy and mount a combined bearing and sensor assembly.

The present invention seeks to provide a combined bearing and sensor assembly and a method of mounting a combined bearing and sensor assembly which overcomes one or more of the disadvantages associated with the prior art discussed above.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a combined bearing and sensor assembly for mounting on a mounting surface, said assembly comprising a bearing unit which includes sensor unit engaging means, and a sensor unit which includes a sensor coupling ring having bearing unit engaging means, the assembly being characterised by the sensor coupling ring further having preferential mounting surface engaging means, whereby said sensor unit engaging means engages with said bearing unit engaging means when said combined bearing and sensor assembly is not mounted on a mounting surface, and said sensor coupling ring engages with the mounting surface in preference to the bearing unit when said combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted on a mounting surface, said sensor coupling ring engaging the mounting surface by means of said preferential mounting surface engaging means, thus allowing said bearing unit to be dismantled from and re-mounted onto said mounting surface without removal or substantial disturbance of the sensor unit.

Reference herein to a mounting surface will be understood as reference to any surface suitable for mounting a sensor unit and/or a bearing unit in, on or around, such as is typically found on axles, axle tubes and bearing housings for example.

Ideally, the preferential mounting surface engaging means is connected to the bearing unit engaging means so as to disengage the bearing unit engaging means from the sensor unit engaging means, or, at least, to weaken the engagement, as the combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted on a mounting surface. In a currently preferred embodiment, the sensor coupling ring is at least in part substantially rotationally symmetrical about a central axis, and includes a generally axially extending first portion, which forms the preferential mounting surface engaging means and whose radially inner surface engages the mounting surface on, for example, an axle or axle tube on which the combined bearing and sensor assembly is to be mounted. In this currently preferred embodiment, a radially inwardly directed lip, the radially inner end of which forms the bearing unit engaging means, is formed on the free end (i.e. the end adjacent to the bearing unit) of the first portion.

The sensor unit engaging means of the bearing unit may take the form of a co-operating surface which is engageable with the bearing unit engaging means, the sensor coupling ring being so constructed and arranged that the bearing unit engaging means is urged radially inwardly into a firm contact with the co-operating surface

when the combined bearing and sensor assembly is not attached to a mounting surface on, for example, an axle or axle tube. The first portion is preferably shaped such that when the sensor coupling ring is mounted onto an axle or axle tube, the radially inwardly directed lip is deflected radially outwardly by a small amount such that the engagement between the bearing unit engaging means and the sensor unit engaging means is at least reduced.

The first portion of the coupling ring may be connected to a radially outwardly extending backing portion having an axially directed flange arranged concentrically with the first portion whereby a sensor may be held in place between the flange and the radially outer surface of the first portion.

In order to increase the deflection of the bearing unit engaging means on mounting the coupling ring on a mounting surface, the coupling ring preferably has slits extending axially inwardly from the free end thereof. Furthermore, the coupling ring may include one or more dedicated cam surfaces which co-operate with the mounting surface to increase the radial deflection of the bearing unit engaging means. Typically, the mounting surface on which the combined bearing and sensor assembly is to be mounted will have a slightly tapered free end, and one of the dedicated cam surfaces may advantageously take the form of a radially directed, rounded ring-like protrusion formed adjacent the free end of the preferential mounting surface engaging means, which protrusion engages said tapered portion of the mounting surface. Ideally, the dedicated cam surfaces and the slits are both formed on the sensor coupling ring, their cumulative effects greatly enhancing the operation of the coupling ring.

Preferably, the sensor unit and the bearing unit are so configured that as they are brought together, permanent opposing abutment surfaces formed on the sensor and bearing units abut one another thus preventing further relative movement of the units towards one another when the air gap between the tone ring and the sensor is of a predetermined size. The opposing abutment surfaces may conveniently be formed on the bearing unit engaging means and the sensor unit engaging means respectively.

Where it is intended that the sensor unit should be dismountable and remountable separately from the bearing unit, the coupling ring may further include stop means to prevent the sensor unit from being pushed too far onto the mounting surface during re-mounting, by engaging with an axially outward facing surface formed on the member, such as an axle or axle tube, onto which the sensor unit is to be re-mounted, when the sensor unit is in the correct position on the mounting surface. Where the bearing unit engaging means takes the form of a radially directed lip, the axially outwardly facing surface formed on one side of the lip may provide one of the opposing abutment surfaces, while the other side of the lip may provide the stop means.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of mounting a bearing assembly onto a mounting surface comprising the steps of releasably engaging a sensor unit having a sensor to a bearing unit having a tone ring so as to maintain a fixed gap between the sensor and the tone ring, the bearing unit and the sensor unit together forming a combined bearing and sensor assembly, and mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly on the mounting surface, said sensor unit being provided with bearing unit engaging means and the method being characterised in that the sensor unit is further provided with preferential mounting surface engaging means, and in that said method further includes the step of deflecting the bearing unit engaging means simultaneously with the step of mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly, such that the engagement between the sensor unit and the bearing unit is weakened while the engagement between the combined bearing and sensor assembly and the mounting surface is increased, whereby the bearing unit may be dismounted from and remounted onto the mounting surface without disturbing the sensor unit.

Preferably, the mounting surface comprises at least a sensor unit mounting surface portion in, on or around which the sensor unit is mounted, and a bearing unit mounting surface portion, in on or around which the bearing unit is mounted. The bearing unit mounting surface portion could conveniently be axially longer than the sensor unit and thus act as a piloting means for ensuring correct alignment of the sensor unit with respect to the sensor unit mounting surface portion during mounting of the combined bearing and sensor assembly.

According to a third aspect of the present invention there is provided a combined bearing and sensor assembly for mounting on a mounting surface, the assembly comprising a bearing unit including a tone ring and a reference surface having a fixed axial relationship to the tone ring; and a sensor unit including an axial sensor and a sensor coupling ring; the assembly being characterised in that the sensor coupling ring includes an abutment surface, having a fixed axial relationship to the sensor, for abutment with the reference surface, preferential mounting surface engaging means for enabling the bearing unit to be dismounted from and re-mounted onto the mounting surface without removal or substantial disturbance of the sensor unit, and axial anchorage means, wherein the axial anchorage means co-operates with the mounting surface to ensure that the abutment surface of the coupling ring remains in abutment with the reference surface of the bearing unit when the sensor unit and the bearing unit have been correctly mounted even after substantial operation of the combined bearing and sensor assembly, whereby the axial gap between the sensor and the tone ring is maintained substantially constant.

According to the third aspect of the present inven-

tion it is not necessary for the bearing unit and the sensor unit to be sold and mounted as a combined unit. However, they co-operate with one another once they have been mounted by means of the abutment between the abutment surface and the reference surface and in this way they may be considered as forming a combined bearing and sensor assembly.

In the present context, the term "axial sensor" refers to a sensor which is axially separated from the tone ring such that a small axial air gap exists between the tone ring and the axial sensor. Radial sensors also exist in which the sensor is radially separated from the tone ring, however, the third aspect of the present invention is not concerned with such arrangements.

The axial anchorage means may co-operate directly with the mounting surface, or alternatively it may co-operate indirectly with the mounting surface via an intermediate member such as a carrier ring.

Preferably the axial anchorage means takes the form of a radially directed lip, or at least one radially directed protrusion, which locates, when the combined bearing and sensor assembly is correctly mounted on the mounting surface, between the bearing unit and the mounting surface. Preferably the abutment surface is formed by an outer axially facing surface formed on the axial anchorage means. Where the assembly further incorporates an intermediate member such as a carrier ring, the axial anchorage means preferably locates between the intermediate member and the bearing unit.

The axial anchorage means ideally locates in an end groove formed either in the bearing unit or in the mounting surface (or, where appropriate, in the intermediate member). The end groove preferably extends radially only as far as the radial length of the axial anchorage means, whereby the majority of the axial stress between the bearing unit and the mounting surface is transmitted by direct abutment between a backface of the bearing unit and an opposing surface of the mounting surface (or intermediate member where appropriate) radially beyond the groove.

Preferably the axial anchorage means includes stop means having a limited amount of give and being adapted to engage the mounting surface (or intermediate member where appropriate) during mounting of the assembly as a result of the abutment between the abutment surface and the reference surface, shortly before the backface of the bearing unit abuts the opposing surface of the mounting surface (or intermediate member where appropriate), wherein the stop means has sufficient give to permit the backface of the bearing unit to continue to move into abutment with the opposing surface of the mounting surface (or intermediate member where appropriate) during mounting of the assembly without damaging the sensor unit, but insufficient give to enable the sensor unit to move axially away from the reference surface during normal usage of the bearing assembly, once the bearing assembly has been correctly mounted. In this way, the stop means acts to take up

any excess axial freedom of movement of the sensor unit when the assembly is correctly mounted on the mounting surface. Such freedom of movement may, for example, result from manufacturing the axial anchorage means to have a slightly narrower axial width than the end groove in which it is to locate, so as to allow for small variations in these widths which result from the machining of these features being achievable only to within certain well known tolerances.

In order that the present invention may be better understood embodiments thereof will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a diagrammatical part cross-sectional view of a combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention mounted on an axle tube;

Figure 2 is an exploded cross-sectional view of a part of the combined bearing and sensor assembly of Figure 1, showing a stop means formed on the coupling ring of the sensor unit;

Figure 3 is a diagrammatical cross-sectional view of the sensor coupling ring shown in Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 4 is an enlarged view of the co-operating surface formed on the bearing unit shown in Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 5 is similar to Figure 2 but shows another embodiment of a combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention;

Figure 6 is a perspective view of a part of a sensor coupling ring of yet another embodiment of a combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention;

Figure 7 is a diagrammatical cross-sectional view of yet another combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention;

Figure 8 is a diagrammatical cross-sectional view of yet another combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention; and

Figure 9 is a diagrammatical cross-sectional view of yet another combined bearing and sensor assembly according to the present invention.

Referring firstly to Figures 1 to 4, the combined bearing and sensor assembly comprises a sensor unit 30 and an anti-friction bearing unit 40. The combined bearing and sensor assembly 30,40 is shown mounted on an axle tube 50 having a spindle 9a and a shoulder 8 with the shoulder 8 having a radially outward facing surface 8a and an axially outward facing surface 8b. The spindle 9a provides a bearing unit mounting surface 9, the radially outward facing surface 8a forms a sensor unit mounting surface and the axially outward facing surface 8b forms an opposing surface which, as is discussed in greater detail below, acts to oppose excessive axial movement of both the bearing unit and the sensor

unit. Collectively, the three surfaces 8a,8b,9 form the mounting surface 8a,8b,9. The sensor unit 30 essentially comprises a sensor 3 held within a sensor coupling ring 10, while the bearing unit 40 is essentially conventional and includes inner 18 and outer 1 raceways with rolling elements 28 therebetween and a seal 6. The outer raceway 1 is press fitted into a hub 51 which rotates with the outer raceway 1. Since the combined bearing and sensor assembly is for use in an anti-lock brake system, the seal 6 also includes a tone ring 4 which has a number of regions (for example magnetised regions) evenly spaced about the tone ring which are detectable by the sensor 3 as they pass close by.

The sensor coupling ring 10 is preferably created out of a stamped and machined piece of metal and is substantially rotationally symmetrical about a central axis. The coupling ring 10 includes a substantially axially extending first portion 5, which forms a preferential mounting surface engaging means, the radially inner surface of which (having an internal diameter 20, see Figure 3) engages the outer surface 8a (having an external diameter 21, see Figure 2) of the shoulder 8 of the axle tube 50. When the coupling ring 10 is not mounted on the axle tube shoulder 8, the first portion 5 may be cylindrical. Alternatively, the first portion 5 may taper slightly towards its free end (i.e. the end adjacent the bearing unit 40 as shown in Figure 1) such that its internal diameter 20 is slightly smaller at this end than at its other end.

An axial anchorage means is provided in the form of a radially inwardly directed lip 22 on the free end of the first portion 5 of the coupling ring 10. The radially inwardly directed lip 22 having an axially outward facing abutment surface 22a, has a radially inner end which forms a bearing unit engaging means or surface 12. Referring to Figure 3, the engaging surface 12 of the lip 22 comprises a radially inwardly tapering portion 12a and a radially outwardly tapering portion 12b. The lip 22 clips into an inner raceway groove 11 which acts as a sensor unit engaging means, having a co-operating surface to engage with the bearing unit engaging surface 12, and in particular the radially inwardly tapering portion 12a thereof.

The lip 22 also has one or more axially inwardly projecting portions 22b, which together form stop means, approximately evenly rotationally spaced around the circumference of the lip. The stop means 22b may be conveniently formed by stamping the lip 22 prior to machining the radially inwardly and outwardly tapering surfaces 12a, 12b around the rest of the lip 22. Each projecting portion 22b initially projects radially inwardly sufficiently far that the maximum axial distance between the axially outwardly facing surface 22a of the lip 22 and the axially inwardly (pointing tip) leading edge of the projecting portion 22b is greater than the axial width of the inner raceway. In this way, when the sensor unit 30 is attached to the bearing unit 40, prior to mounting the combined assembly, the axially (pointing tip) inwardly leading edge

of the or each projecting portion 22b projects axially inwardly beyond the axially inward facing surface of the inner raceway 18.

Each projecting portion 22b, however, is sufficiently deformable and/or resilient that when the combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted, for example, on an axle tube 50 as shown in Figures 1 and 2, the stop means is pressed by the axially outward facing surface 8b axially outwardly until it is substantially flush with the axially inward facing surface or backface 23 of the inner raceway 18. This in turn ensures that the axially outward facing surface of the lip 22 is constantly urged against a substantially axially facing abutment surface 19 formed by the inner raceway groove 11. This is important as it ensures that the (maximum) spacing between the tone ring 4 and the sensor 3 is accurately set and maintained as a result of mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly. The stop means 22b also acts to ensure that if the sensor unit 30 is dismounted, it may be remounted into the correct position on its mounting surface without pushing the sensor unit too far axially inwardly.

The inner raceway groove 11 is located on the outside diameter of the inner raceway of the anti-friction bearing unit 40. As is most clearly seen in Figure 4, the inner raceway groove 11, defines a substantially radially outward facing inner raceway groove surface 13, and a reference surface in the form of a substantially axially facing abutment surface 19, which abutment surface 19 faces the sensor 3 when in use. Formed on the other side of the inner raceway groove surface 13 is the backface 23 of the inner raceway 18 of the bearing unit 40. At the shoulder between the backface 23 and the inner raceway groove surface 13 there is a small radial protrusion 13b with smoothly curved radially inwardly extending surfaces tapering away on either side to form a cam surface 13c on the side adjacent to the backface 23 and a sensor unit engaging surface 13a on the side adjacent the abutment surface 19. Of course, the surfaces 13a and 13c need not curve smoothly away from the protrusion 13b, but could instead simply be chamfered to provide straight tapering surfaces. When the bearing unit engaging surface 12 engages the sensor unit engaging surface 13a, the lip 22 is positively retained between the surface 13a and the abutment surface 19 because the surface 13a tapers radially inwardly away from the small radial protrusion 13b.

Prior to mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly 30,40 onto the axle tube 50, the coupling ring 10 is clipped into the inner raceway groove 11, by elastic deformation, in a radial sense, of the lip 22 such that the bearing unit engaging surface 12 passes over the radial protrusion 13b and onto the sensor unit engaging surface 13a. The elastic deformation may be caused simply by pushing the sensor unit 30 onto the bearing unit 40, with the radially outwardly tapering portion 12b of the surface 12 co-operating with the cam surface 13c to deflect the lip 22 radially outwardly. The sensor coupling

ring 10 is designed to deform elastically in a maximum radial manner to allow the minimum internal clipping diameter 14 of the sensor coupling ring 10 to expand to just larger than the maximum external diameter 15 of the radial protrusion 13b.

Once the engaging surface 12 has passed over the radial protrusion 13b, the lip 22 snaps back, radially inwardly, approximately to its original state. The minimum internal clipping diameter 14 is then less than the maximum external diameter 15 of the radial protrusion 13b so that the lip 22 is axially constrained between the radial protrusion 13b and the abutment surface 19. The coupling ring 10 may be configured such that an interference fit is created between the radially inwardly tapering portion 12a, of the bearing unit engaging surface 12, and the sensor unit engaging surface 13a; alternatively, however, the coupling ring may be configured such that the fit within the groove 11 is loose to allow for free axial rotation between the sensor unit and the bearing unit. It is in this arrangement that the combined bearing and sensor assembly may be shipped and stored.

If an interference fit is created between the portion 12a and the sensor unit engaging surface 13a, each of which tapers radially inwardly, at clipping angles 16 and 17 respectively, in an axially outward direction (i.e. from left to right as shown in Figure 1), a bias is generated which acts to further prevent the sensor coupling ring 10 from becoming disengaged from the inner raceway 18 during shipping and handling.

To mount the combined bearing and sensor assembly 30,40 onto the axle tube spindle 9a, the first portion 5 of the coupling ring 10 is driven onto the axle tube shoulder 8 creating an interference fit between the internal and external surfaces of these elements respectively. The axially facing abutment surface 19 transmits an axial force to the coupling ring 10 via the lip 22 to force the coupling ring 10 onto the axle tube shoulder 8 without causing buckling of the coupling ring. The relationship between the axially facing abutment surface 19 and the backface 23 of the inner raceway 18 which locates against the axially outward facing surface 8b of the shoulder 8, ensures the positioning of the coupling ring 10 in the correct place on the radially outward facing surface 8a of the shoulder 8 so as to establish the desired air gap 2 between the sensor 3 and the tone ring 4 in the mounted condition. In addition, the stop means 22b presses against the opposing, axially outward facing surface 8b of the shoulder 8 to ensure that the abutment surface 22a is constantly in abutment with the reference surface 19.

The interference fit between the coupling ring 10 and the shoulder 8 causes the internal clipping diameter 14 of the coupling ring 10 to expand radially such that any interference fit condition between the engaging surfaces 12a,13a is broken, and the internal clipping diameter 14 is expanded to clear the maximum external diameter 15 of the radial protrusion 13b.

During routine maintenance, the anti-friction bear-

ing unit 40 with the tone ring 4 can be removed from the axle tube spindle 9a without substantially disturbing the sensor unit 30 by virtue of the radial expansion of the internal clipping diameter 14 to substantially clear the external diameter of the radial protrusion 13b. Although statistical tolerancing and manufacturing process variations may result in a residual interference between the engaging surface 12 and the radial protrusion 13b during separation of the bearing unit 40 from the sensor unit 30, the interference fit between the first portion 5 and the radially outward facing surface 8a of the shoulder 8, resists forces generated by any such residual interference, when the bearing unit 40 is removed from the axle tube spindle 9a.

After routine maintenance, the bearing unit 40 may be remounted onto the axle tube spindle 9a, the clearance between the internal clipping diameter 14 and the maximum external radial protrusion diameter 15 allowing the tone ring 4 to be brought back into the correct position to re-establish the desired air gap 2. This happens automatically when the axially facing abutment surface 19 and the inner raceway backface 23 are brought into contact with the lip 22 and the axially outward facing surface 8b of the shoulder 8 respectively. As before, any residual interference during remounting between the surfaces 12 and 13 is not sufficient to overcome the interference fit between the first portion 5 and the radially outward facing surface 8a.

Similarly, the magnitude of the interference fit between the first portion 5 and the radially outward facing surface 8a of the shoulder 8, is sufficient to prevent any creeping of the inner raceway 18 from being transmitted to the sensor unit 30.

Referring now to Figure 5, the coupling ring 10 is shown with a dedicated cam surface 10a provided on the first portion 5 towards its axially outer end adjacent to where the lip 22 is formed. This dedicated cam surface 10a serves to assist in the radial expansion of the lip 22 during mounting of the combined bearing and sensor assembly onto an axle or axle tube. Since the cam surface 10a co-operates with a tapered surface 8c on the shoulder 8 of the axle tube 50 the dedicated cam surface 10a does not adversely affect the interference fit between the coupling ring 10 and the radially outward facing surface 8a of the shoulder 8.

Figure 6 shows a further embodiment of the coupling ring 10 in which a plurality of cuts or slices 25 have been formed extending axially inwardly from the outer end of the coupling ring 10 thereby dividing the coupling ring 10 into interconnected tabs. Although these cuts 25 are shown as extending only partially into the first portion 5, they could extend as far or as little into the first portion as desired. The purpose of the tabs is to introduce greater freedom of deformation of the bearing unit engaging means, thus easing the assembly of the coupling ring 10 into the inner raceway groove 11 and facilitating the radial expansion of the lip 22 which prompts the disengagement of the bearing unit and inner race-

way groove engagement surfaces 12 and 13.

Figure 7 shows a further embodiment of the present invention in which a unitised bearing comprising an outer race 1 an inner race 18 and a plurality of rollers 28 is shown in place of the packaged bearing unit shown in Figure 1. Since a unitised bearing is used in this embodiment, a slightly different seal 6a is used and it is located not between the races 1 and 18 as was the case in Figure 1, but instead it is located between the hub 51 and the axle tube 50. The seal 6a is press fitted into the hub 51 for rotation therewith. Furthermore, an intermediate member in the form of a carrier ring 60 is shown located axially between the backface 23 of inner race 18 and the opposing surface 8b of the mounting surface 8a,8b, 9 which, as before, is split up into a bearing unit mounting surface 9, a sensor unit mounting surface 8a and an opposing surface 8b.

In this embodiment, there is no bearing unit engaging means formed on the lip 22 of the coupling ring 10, nor is there any sensor unit engaging means formed on the bearing unit 40. Instead, the coupling ring 10 engages with the carrier ring 60. The carrier ring 60 and sensor 30 may be sold, shipped and mounted either together or separately. As before, the lip 22 acts as an axial anchorage means and has stop means (not shown) formed on the axially inward facing surface thereof for co-operating with the opposing surface 8b of the mounting surface 8a,8b,9, in this case via the carrier ring 60, to maintain the abutment surface 22a formed on the lip 22 in constant abutment with the reference surface in this case formed by the backface 23. It can be seen that in this embodiment an end groove has been formed not in the inner race 18 but instead in the carrier ring 60. Nonetheless, the effect in terms of providing an anchorage for the radial lip 22 while permitting the abutment surface 22a to be urged into constant abutment with the reference surface at the same time as permitting the bearing unit 40 to be dismounted from the bearing unit mounting surface 9 without disturbing the sensor unit 30, is similar to the effect of the arrangement shown in Figure 1.

Figure 8 shows an embodiment which is very similar to that of Figure 7 except that in this embodiment there is no carrier ring. The bearing unit 40 is again a unitised bearing unit and thus the seal 6a is the same as in Figure 7. Again there is no end groove formed in the inner race 18 and instead an end groove is formed directly in the axle tube 50. In this case, the majority of the axial stress between the bearing unit 40 and the axle tube 50 is taken across the boundary between these two items radially inwardly of the bottom of the end groove formed in the axle tube 50.

Finally, Figure 9 shows a further embodiment of the present invention in which a packaged bearing unit 40 is used as was the case in the embodiment shown in Figure 1 such that a seal 6 is used as before which is located between the inner 18 and outer 1 races. The main difference between this embodiment and that

shown in Figure 1 is that an end groove has been formed not in the inner race 18 but in the axle tube 50. As discussed above in relation to Figures 7 and 8, the main effect of this movement of the end groove is that the sensor unit 30 can no longer clip on to the bearing unit when the assembly is not mounted on the mounting surface 8a,8b,9 (eg during shipping and handling). In all other respects, however, the arrangement functions in almost exactly the same way as in the embodiment shown in Figure 1.

The foregoing description of currently preferred embodiments of the present invention are not meant to be limiting. In particular, although steel is a suitable material from which to manufacture for example the sensor coupling ring, other materials having sufficient strength, flexibility and durability may also be used. This is also true of most of the other components of the bearing and sensor assembly. Similarly, although the described embodiments relate to a combined bearing and sensor assembly in which the outer raceway rotates, the invention is also applicable to an assembly in which the inner raceway rotates and the outer raceway and sensor unit are mounted within a fixed bearing housing, the tone ring being attached to the inner raceway and all features such as the sensor and bearing unit engaging surfaces being radially inverted. Other adaptations and modifications to the described embodiment will be apparent to those skilled in the art which will none-the-less fall within the scope of the present invention as set out in the claims below.

Claims

1. A combined bearing and sensor assembly for mounting on a mounting surface, said assembly comprising a bearing unit (40) which includes sensor unit engaging means (11), and a sensor unit (30) which includes a sensor coupling ring (10) having bearing unit engaging means (12), the assembly being characterised by the sensor coupling ring further having preferential mounting surface engaging means (5), whereby said sensor unit engaging means (11) engages with said bearing unit engaging means (12) when said combined bearing and sensor assembly is not mounted on a mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9), and said sensor coupling ring (10) engages with the mounting surface (8a) in preference to the bearing unit (40) when said combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted on a mounting surface, said sensor coupling ring engaging the mounting surface (8a) by means of said preferential mounting surface engaging means (5), thus allowing said bearing unit (40) to be dismounted from and re-mounted onto said mounting surface (9) without removal or substantial disturbance of the sensor unit (30).

2. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in the preceding claim wherein the preferential mounting surface engaging means (5) is connected to the bearing unit engaging means (12) so that the engagement between the bearing unit (40) and the sensor unit (30) is at least weakened as the combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted on a mounting surface (8, 9).
3. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in either one of the preceding claims wherein the bearing unit engaging means (12) is formed on a substantially radially directed lip (22) formed on the coupling ring (10).
4. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the sensor unit (30) includes a sensor (3) and the bearing unit (40) includes a tone ring (4).
5. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in claim 4 wherein opposing abutment surfaces (19, 22a) are formed on the bearing unit and the sensor unit respectively which act to maintain a predetermined minimum separation (2) between the tone ring (4) and the sensor (3).
6. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in either one of claims 4 or 5 wherein the sensor unit (30) includes stop means (22b) for preventing the sensor unit (30) from being pushed too far onto its respective mounting surface (8a) during mounting of the sensor unit (30), whereby the stop means (22b) acts to maintain a predetermined maximum separation (2) between the tone ring (4) and the sensor (3).
7. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in claim 6 wherein the stop means (22b) comprises at least one axially extending projection (22b) directed away from the bearing unit (40) and formed on the substantially radially directed lip (22) of the coupling ring (10).
8. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the coupling ring (10) has a plurality of slits (25) extending axially away from the bearing unit (40) from the outer end of the coupling ring (10) whereby a plurality of inter-connecting tabs are formed in the coupling ring (10) which extend towards the bearing unit (40).
9. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein a dedicated cam surface (10a) is formed on the preferential mounting surface engaging means whereby the weakening of the engagement between the bearing unit (40) and the sensor unit (30) as the combined bearing and sensor assembly is mounted on a mounting surface is enhanced.
10. A method of mounting a bearing assembly onto a mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9) comprising the steps of releasably engaging a sensor unit (30) having a sensor (3) to a bearing unit (40) having a tone ring (4) so as to maintain a fixed gap (2) between the sensor (3) and the tone ring (4), the bearing unit (40) and the sensor unit (30) together forming a combined bearing and sensor assembly, and mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly on the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9), said sensor unit (30) being provided with bearing unit engaging means (12) and the method being characterised in that the sensor unit (30) is further provided with preferential mounting surface engaging means (5), and in that said method further includes the step of deflecting the bearing unit engaging means (12) simultaneously with the step of mounting the combined bearing and sensor assembly, such that the engagement between the sensor unit (30) and the bearing unit (40) is weakened while the engagement between the combined bearing and sensor assembly and the mounting surface (8a, 9) is increased, whereby the bearing unit (40) may be dismounted from and remounted onto the mounting surface (9) without disturbing the sensor unit (30).
11. A combined bearing and sensor assembly for mounting on a mounting surface, the assembly comprising a bearing unit (40) including a tone ring (4) and a reference surface (19) having a fixed axial relationship to the tone ring (4); and a sensor unit (30) including an axial sensor (3) and a sensor coupling ring (10); the assembly being characterised in that the sensor coupling ring (10) includes an abutment surface (22a), having a fixed axial relationship to the sensor (3), for abutment with the reference surface (19), preferential mounting surface engaging means (5) for enabling the bearing unit (40) to be dismounted from and re-mounted onto the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9) without removal or substantial disturbance of the sensor unit (30), and axial anchorage means (22), wherein the axial anchorage means (22) co-operates with the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9) to ensure that the abutment surface (22a) of the coupling ring (10) remains in abutment with the reference surface (19) of the bearing unit (40) when the sensor unit (30) and the bearing unit (40) have been correctly mounted even after substantial operation of the combined bearing and sensor assembly, whereby the axial gap (2) between the sensor (3) and the tone ring (4) is maintained substantially constant.
12. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as

claimed in claim 11 further comprising an intermediate member (60) located axially between the backface (23) of the bearing unit (40) and an opposing surface (8b) formed on the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9).

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13. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in either one of claims 11 or 12 wherein the abutment surface (22a) is formed on the axial anchorage means (22).

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14. A combined bearing and sensor assembly as claimed in either one of claims 11 to 13 wherein the axial anchorage means (22) includes stop means (22b) having a limited amount of give for co-operating with the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9) to take up any excess axial freedom of movement of the sensor unit (30) when the assembly is correctly mounted on the mounting surface (8a, 8b, 9).

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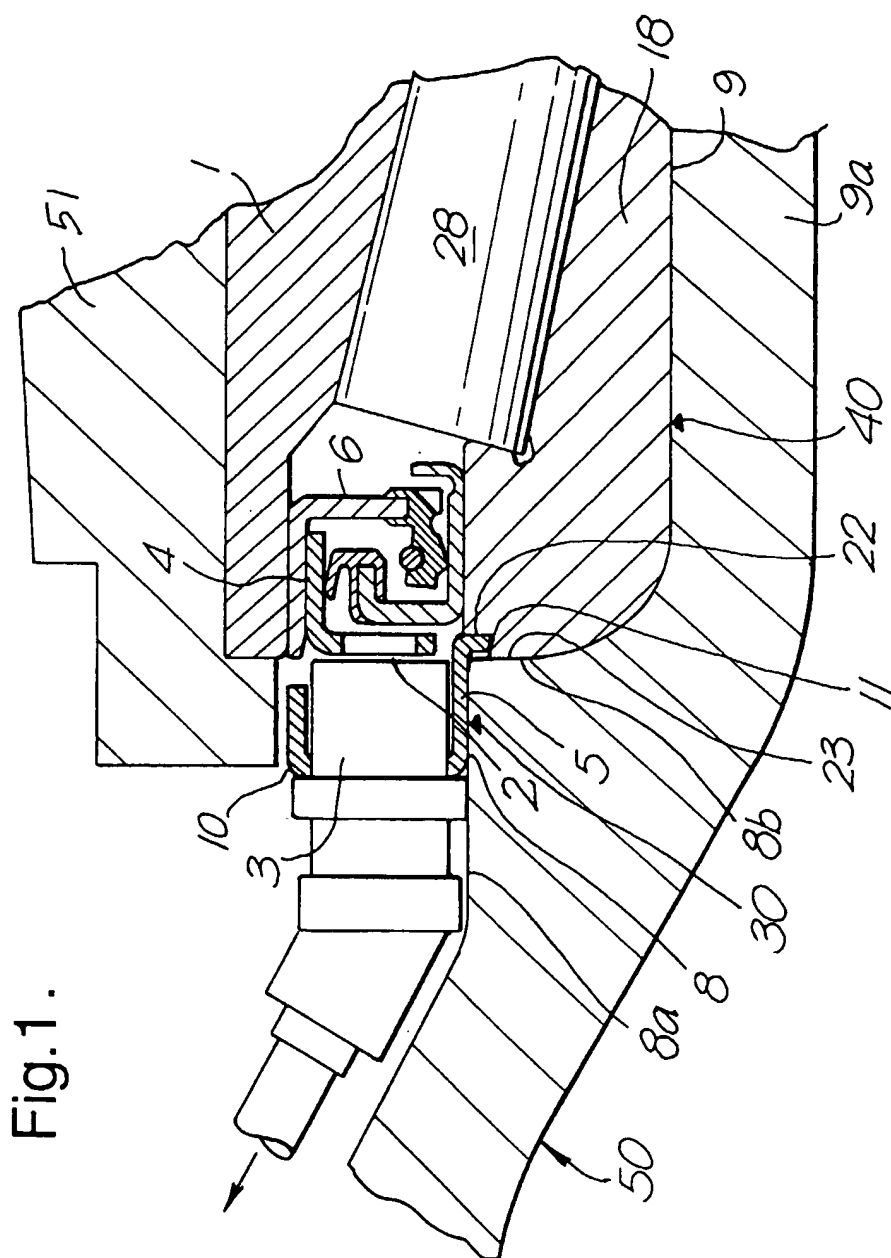


Fig. 1.

Fig.2.

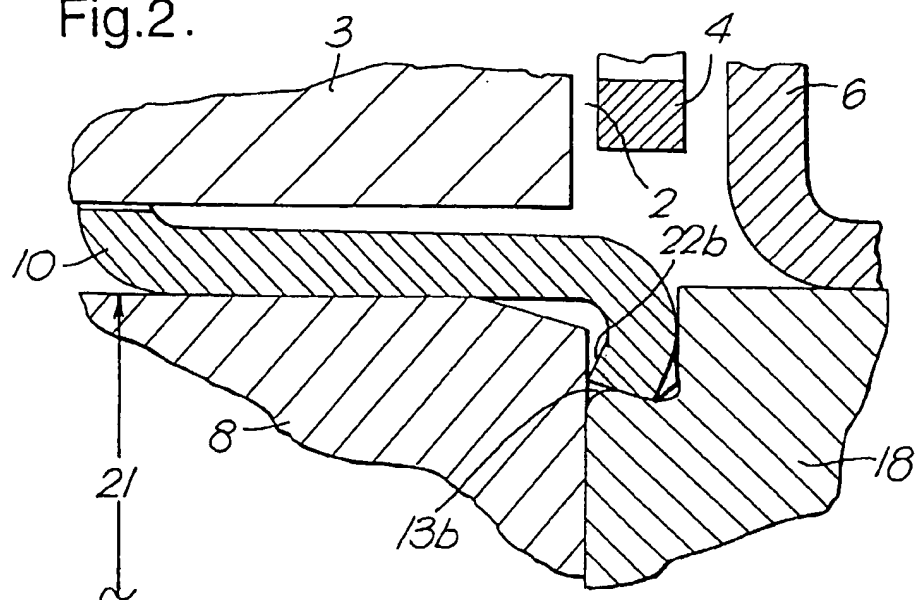


Fig.3.

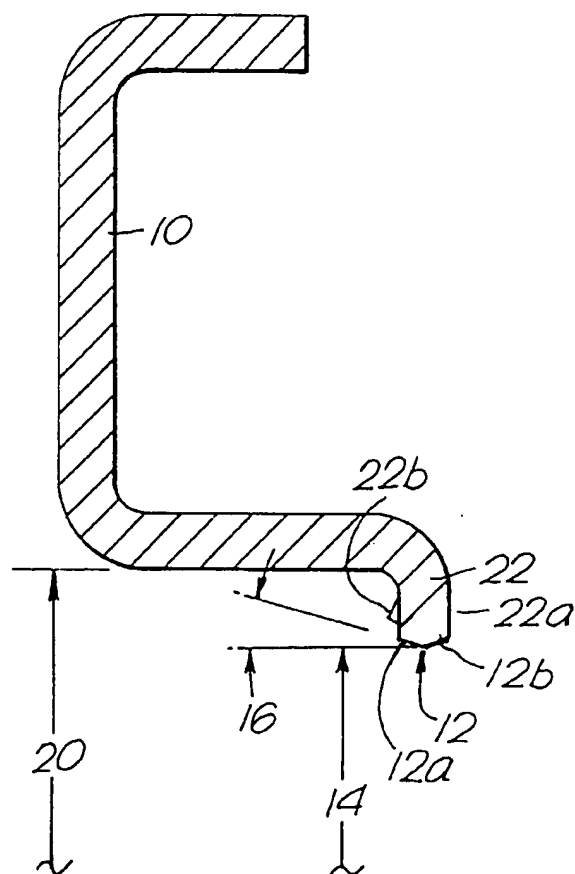


Fig.4.

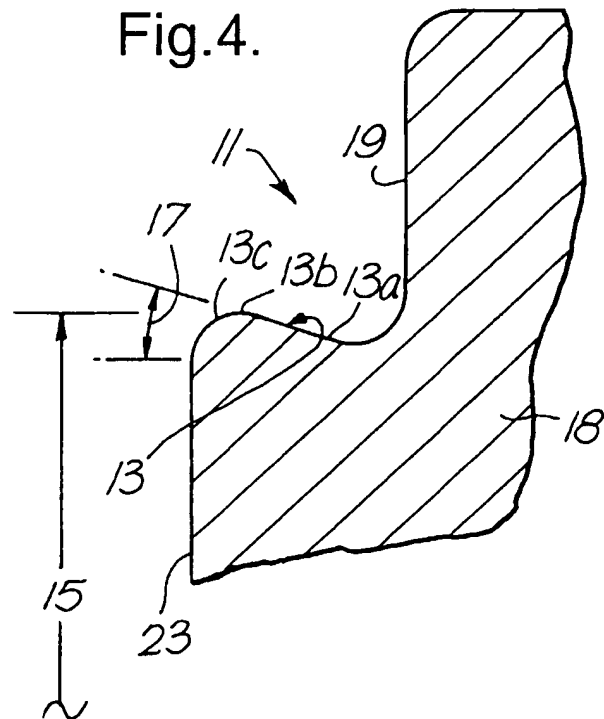


Fig.5.

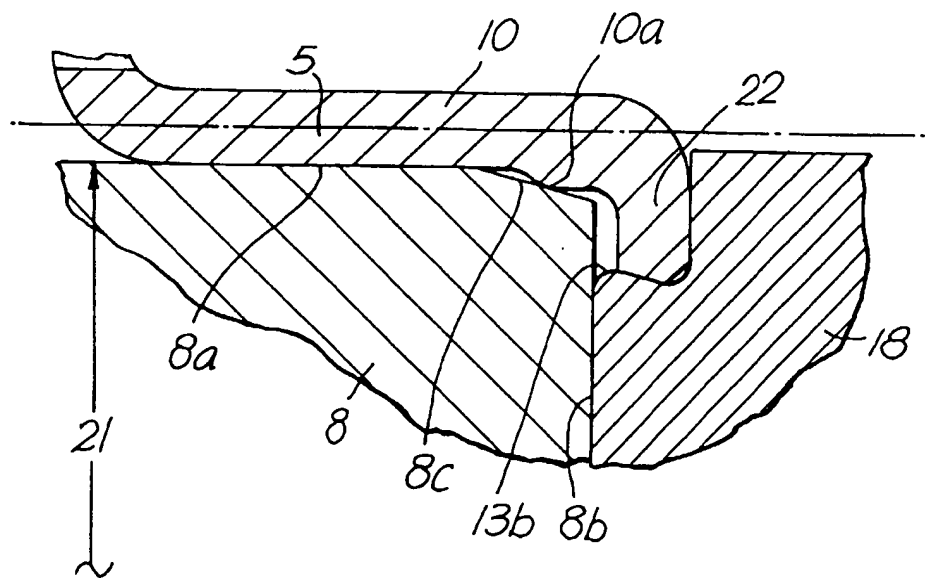


Fig.6.

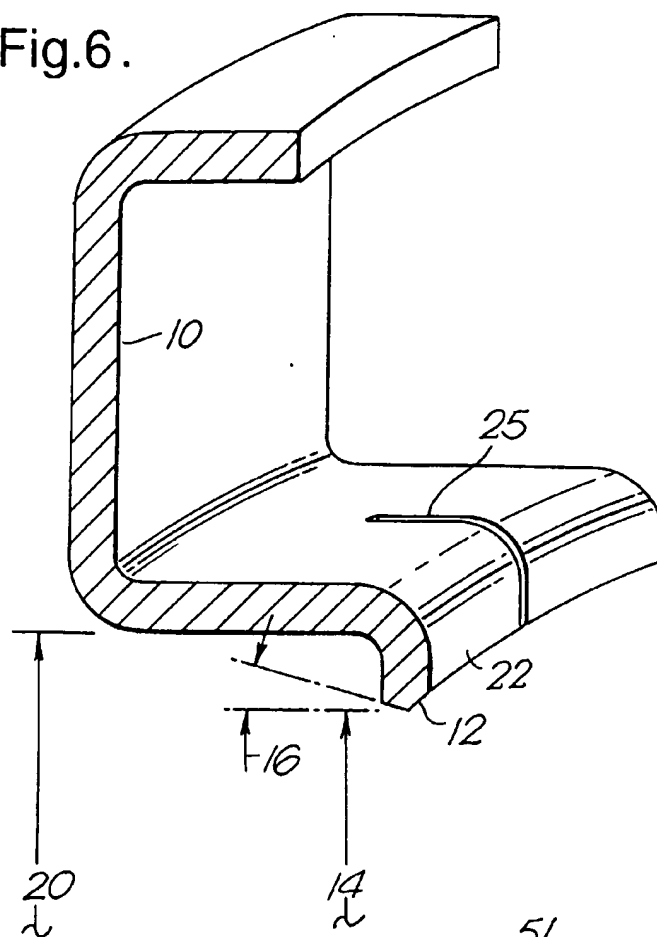


Fig.9.

